

No 36.

#4

An Essay  
on

Dyspepsia

by John Harris of Pennsylvania  
finished 19<sup>th</sup> March 1816

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# An Essay on Dyspepsia

It has been said, and not without good reason, that for one new truth given to the world by theoretical writers, there are ten falsehoods: how cautious then ought we not to be in advancing opinions which may affect the health and lives of our fellow creatures!

A sense of the danger attending a deviation from the beaten path in medical science, would alone be sufficient to deter me from offering sentiments at variance with those which have received the sanction of men of eminence in our profession — but when I call to mind that the foundation of all theory must be facts it appears that to offer such sentiments would be highly presumptuous in one so inexperienced. Nor do I even



profess to place in a clearer light, or lay down<sup>2</sup>  
in more impressive language, opinions which  
I consider as already established — To produce an  
essay so free from gross error, as to escape the con-  
demnation of those who are my judges, will be to  
equal my expectation. — This acknowledgement  
is pardonable in one, whom, not the "partiality  
of friends," nor his own vanity, nor any thing short  
of the unbending rules of this institution, and a  
prospect of the high honors, which depend upon a  
compliance with them, could induce to become  
an author. —

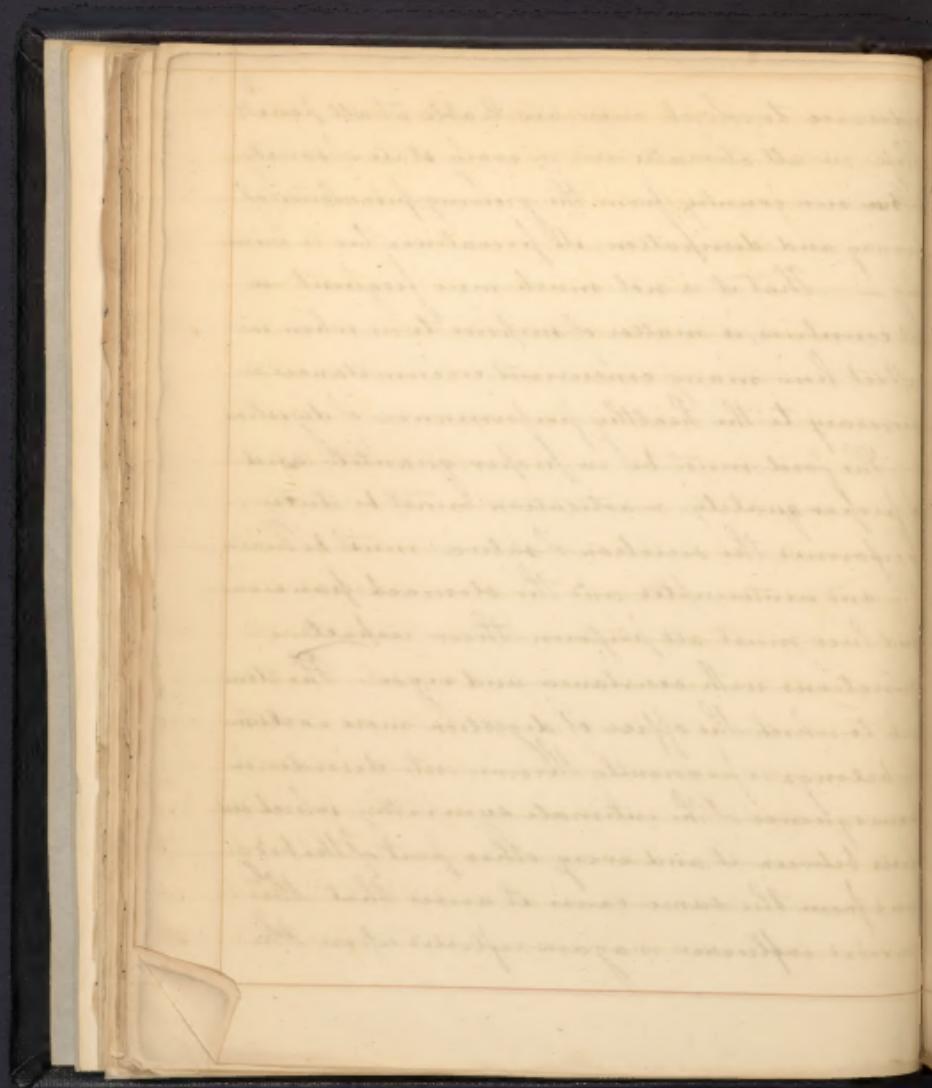
In deciding upon a proper subject  
for a dissertation I have experienced much anxiety.  
Having for several years been the inmate of a  
gentleman much harassed with dyspepsia, that  
disease presented itself to my mind as one of  
the most obstinate and distressing to which the human  
system is subject, and on that account, as one having  
a strong claim upon my attention. It is

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a disease to which men are liable at all periods  
of life in all climates and in every state of society.

~~In~~ our country, from the growing prevalence of  
luxury and dissipation, its prevalence too is incus-  
ing - That it is not much more frequent in  
all countries, is matter of surprise to us when we  
reflect how many concurrent circumstances are  
necessary to the healthy performance of digestion.

The food must be in proper quantity and  
of proper quality, mastication must be duly  
performed, the secretion of saliva must be healthy  
and uninterrupted and the stomach pancreas  
and liver must all perform their respective  
functions with constancy and vigor. The stomach  
to which the office of digestion more exclusively  
belongs, is frequently thrown into disorder, in  
consequence of the intimate sympathy, which subs-  
ists between it and every other part of the body;  
and from the same cause it arises that this  
morbid influence, is again reflected upon the



assistant organs of digestion, and other parts of the frame; so that ultimately the whole system becomes diseased or from defect of nourishment debilitated.

Thus, the different organs, which in health mutually support each other, when diseased, withdraw their support, or exert a deleterious influence.

Dr Cullen has placed dyspepsia under his class Neuroses, and order Adynamia. Its name, derived from the Greek words σύν, badly, or with difficulty & οὐδέν, to conceive was suggested by the physiological views which were entertained of the process of digestion.

It is sufficiently expressive to render unnecessary a definition. Its application however is restricted by Nosologists to those cases in which the stomach is the original seat of disease. Although disorder of the liver or other organs may induce a state of disease in which the most preying symptoms are those of indigestion, yet as those cases can only be cured by an attention to the primary disease, they should be designated by different names, for too often in

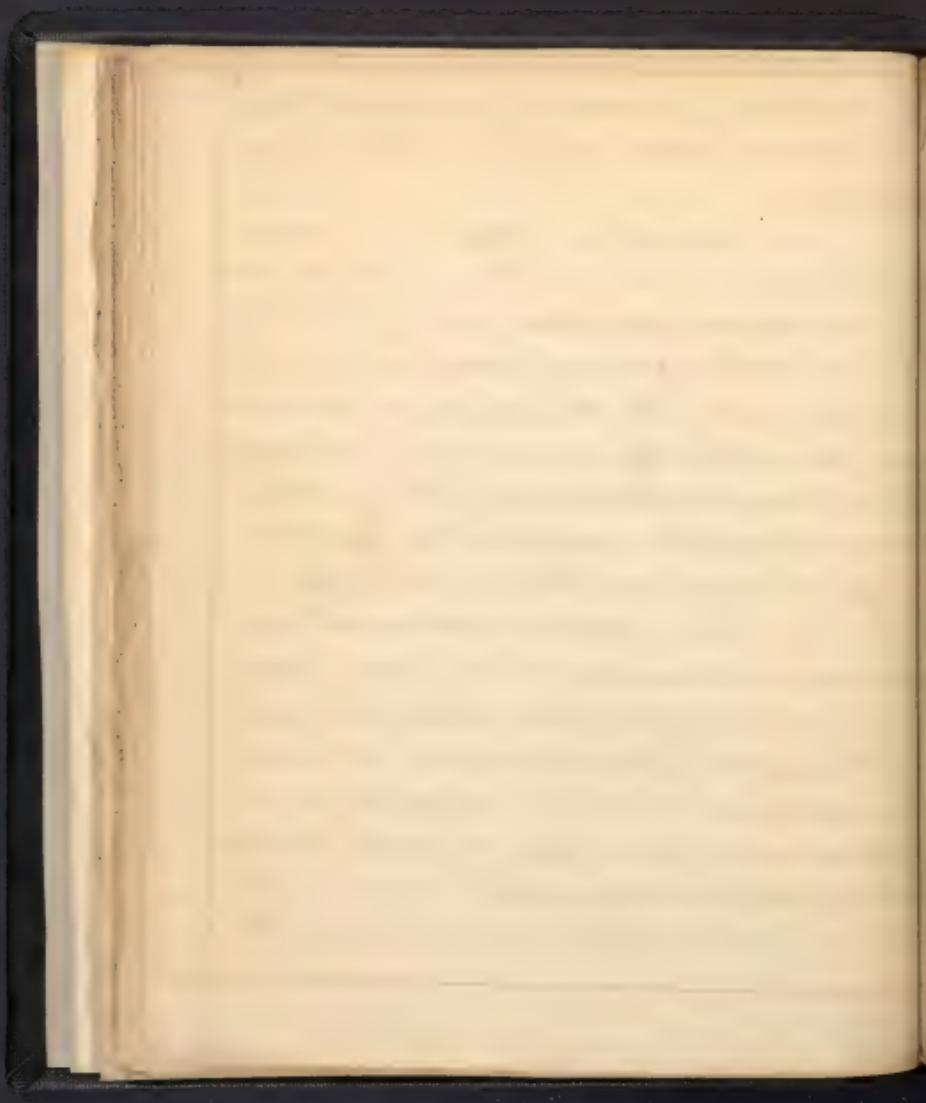
continuation of his narrative goes on to relate  
the progress of the campaign, the capture of  
the fort, the return home of the party, and  
the arrival of the Indians at their village.  
The narrative ends with the statement that  
the Indians had been very friendly to the party.

The narrative then continues with the  
description of the Indians' camp, their  
habits, their mode of life, and their customs.  
The Indians are described as being  
very friendly to the party, and the narrative  
ends with the statement that the Indians  
had been very friendly to the party.

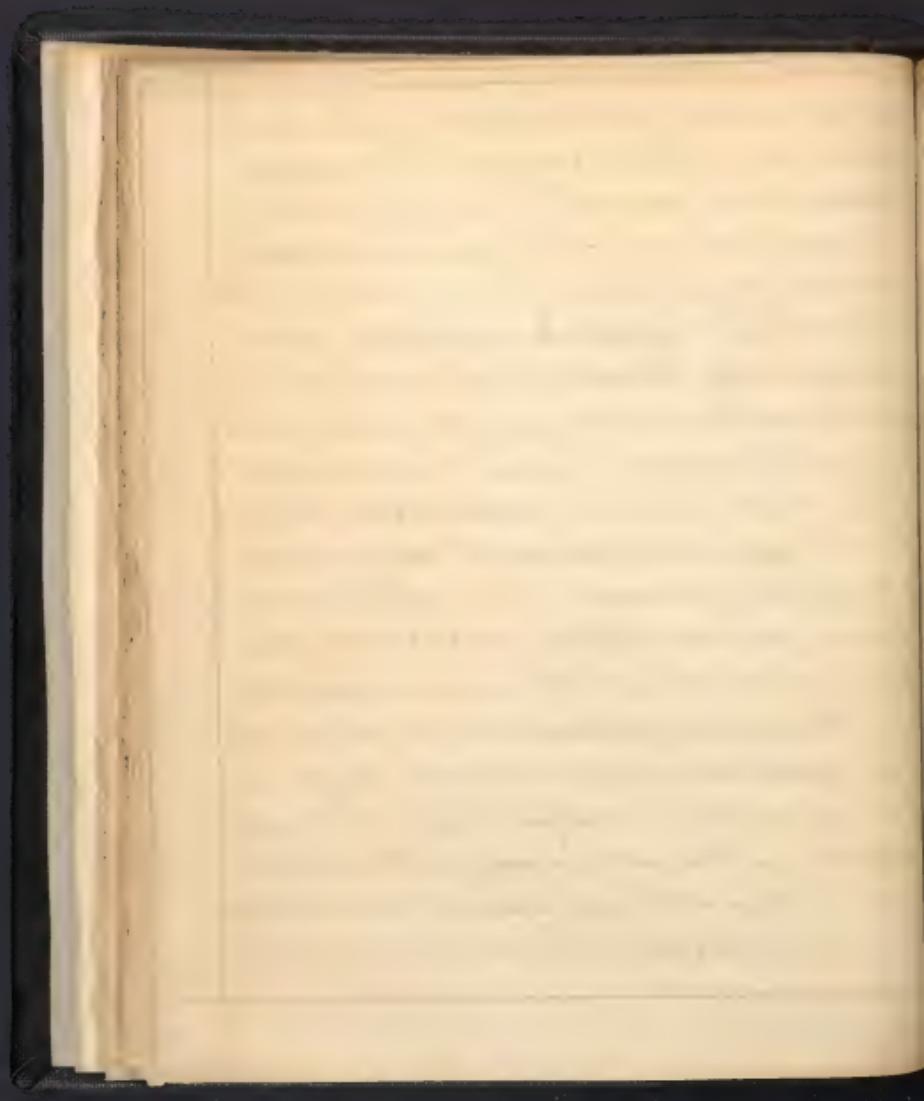
our treatment of diseases are we guided by<sup>5</sup>  
their names, instead of by the history of their  
symptoms.

The symptoms of dyspepsia are anorexia, flatulency, eructations mostly acid, sputum, nausea, vomiting, spasmodic pain of the stomach, or when empty a gnawing pain, fixed pain referred to the lower end of the sternum, aversion from exercise, general debility and emaciation, sallowness of countenance or after a meal flushing, vertigo, small & slow pulse easily quickened by exercise, terrifying dreams, and obstinate constipation or diarrhoea. There sometimes occurs in this disease a peculiar state of mind denominated vapors which is thus described by Dr. Cullen -

"A languor, listlessness, or want of resolution and activity with respect to all undertakings: a disposition to sadness, sadness and timidity as to all future events an apprehension of the worst or most unhappy state of them; and therefor



fore often upon slight ground, on apprehension  
of great evil. Such persons are particularly  
attentive to the state of their own health, noticing  
the smallest change of feeling in their bodies,  
and from any unusual feeling, perhaps of the  
 slightest kind they apprehend great danger and  
even death itself. In respect to all these feelings and  
apprehensions there is commonly, the most obstinate  
belief and persuasion." — This is the state  
of mind which occurs in hypochondriasis, but which  
also not unfrequently attends the disease which  
is the subject of this essay. — The last part of the des-  
cription just quoted, viz "that in respect to all these  
feelings & apprehensions there is commonly, the  
most obstinate belief & persuasion" will seldom ap-  
ply to dyspepsia for in this disease the languor &  
timidity can for the most part, before a time, readily  
dispelled. — It is not to be supposed that all these  
symptoms occur in the same person at the same time  
or even during the course of his disease, nor is it to



be understood that we have enumerated all the symptoms which may occur in dyspepsia, for a difference of constitution & other circumstances in the animal economy, are adequate to the production of a much greater variety. The symptoms will also vary much in their degrees of violence in different cases and at different stages of the same case, being generally milder in the beginning, & more aggravated in proportion to their duration.

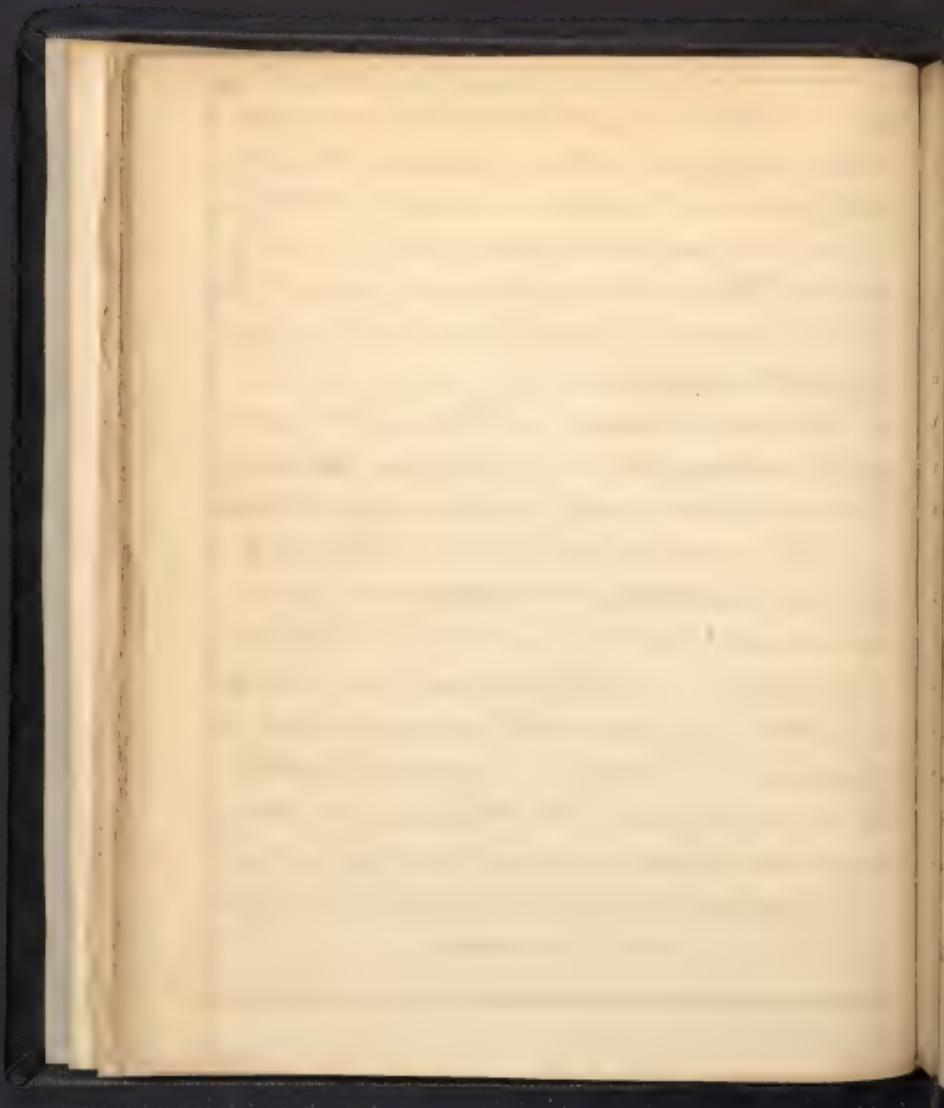
### Remote causes.

The causes of dyspepsia are all such as induce general debility or debility of the stomach in particular. The most frequent are, excessive exercise or a too violent and sedentary life, the operation of the depressing passions, as fear, grief, anxiety or any uneasiness of mind, profuse evacuations, excessive venery, long fasting, intemperance in eating or drinking, excessive use of stimulating condiments or warm diuretic drinks, of coffee, tea, of tobacco or opium, decayed teeth frequent emetics or irritati-



repletion of the stomach &c — To these might be added imperfect secretion of saliva, bile or pancreatic juice with — changes or structure of the pylorus &c. but cases which depend upon organic affection of the stomach itself, or upon disease of the neighboring organs are not to be considered as cases of idiopathic dyspepsia.

Proximate Cause. "The cure of diseases" says the celebrated Edinburgh professor "is chiefly and almost unavowably founded in a knowledge of their proximate causes." This is a truth which with some limitation, will be assented to by all who believe our noble art to be founded upon the broad basis of reason. — The proximate cause of a disease is that circumstance, the removal of which affects its cure. — An insufficiency or want of tone in the muscular fibres of the stomach or of its secreting vessels or both we suppose to be the proximate cause of dyspepsia, and upon this supposition our indications of cure will be founded.



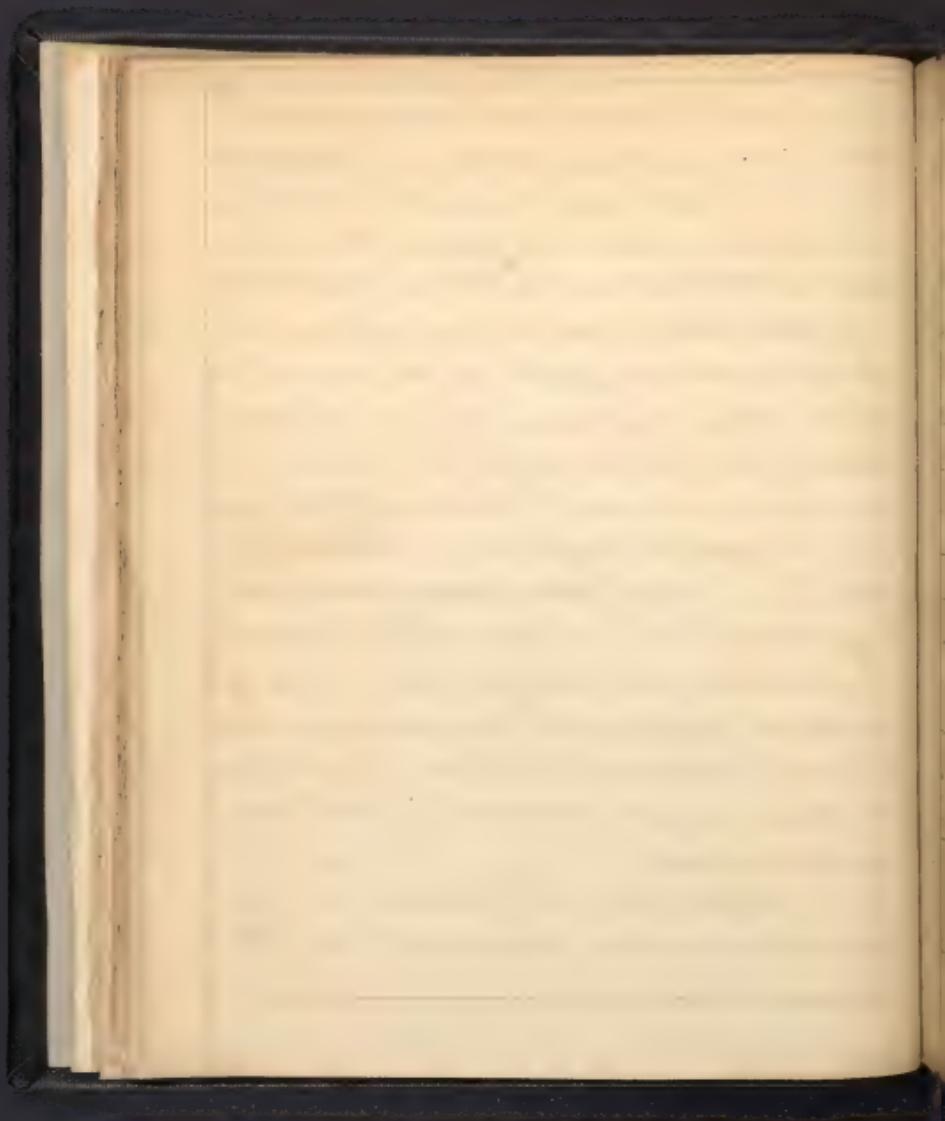
Diagnosis. The disease with which dyspepsia would be most readily confounded is hypochondriasis. They are thus distinguished by medical writers.

In hypochondriasis the affection of the mind is greater than that of the stomach, & than in dyspepsia.

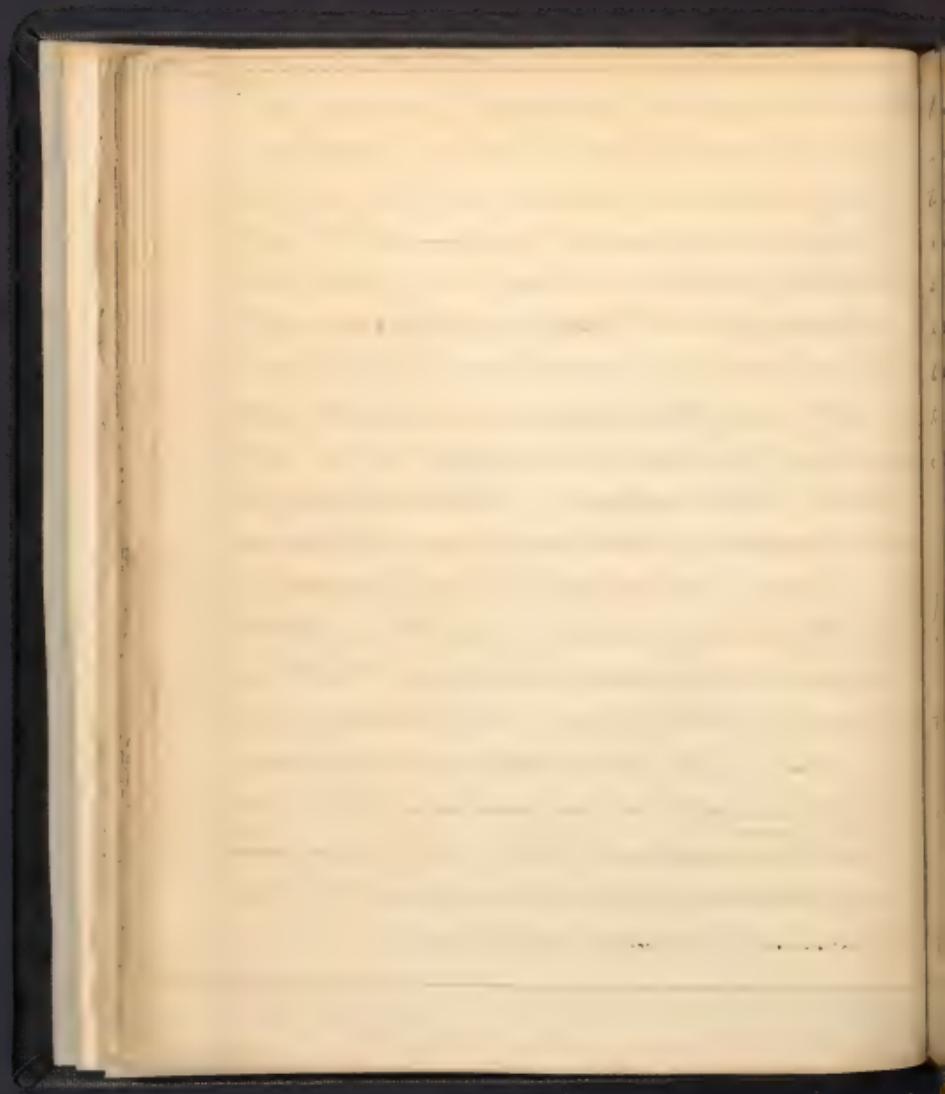
Hypochondriasis is said to occur in the melancholic temperament, and after the middle period of life dyspepsia more frequently in early life and in persons of a sanguineous temperament. The former is increased as age advances. The latter is often diminished. "In dyspepsia" says the author we have before cited "there is more of spasmodic affection, and the affection of the mind is often absent, and when present is perhaps always of a slighter kind, while in hypochondriasis, the affection of the mind is more constant, and the symptoms of dyspepsia or the affection of the stomach are often absent, or when present are in a slighter degree."

#### Appearances on Dissection.

Upon the examination of persons who die after



the long continuance of dyspeptic symptoms. The <sup>10</sup>  
pylorus or lower orifice of the stomach is often found  
contracted ulcerated or scirrous, and the stomach it-  
self much distended with air. — In the 3d vol.  
of Dr. Box's Medical Museum, is to be found an ac-  
count given by Dr. E. D. Smith of Charleston S.C.,  
of a case in which tumor and pain in the lower part  
of the left side of the abdomen gave rise to the suspi-  
cion that the spleen was enlarged. Mercury was  
prescribed without advantage. A blister applied pro-  
duced symptoms of violent delirium. The man after  
lingering some months died, and on dissection pre-  
sented the following appearance: The liver, kidneys,  
etc presented no unusual appearance. The thorax  
was examined but no disorder could be traced in any  
of its viscera. The large vessels proceeding from  
the heart were collapsed and natural. Upon opening  
\* From the circumstance of his having fallen from  
a height sometime previous to his illness it was  
thought an aneurism might exist.



"the humor," which was formed by the stomach," / "faeces  
were discovered in the lower part of it, probably owing  
to an inverted peristaltic motion. The pylorus was  
much contracted in size and discolored. The differ-  
ent coats of the stomach were obliterated, and pre-  
sented a disagreeable appearance to the eye. The  
texture of the viscus was hard and gritty, and  
the cavity was contracted to one fourth its natu-  
ral size."

### Of the Cure

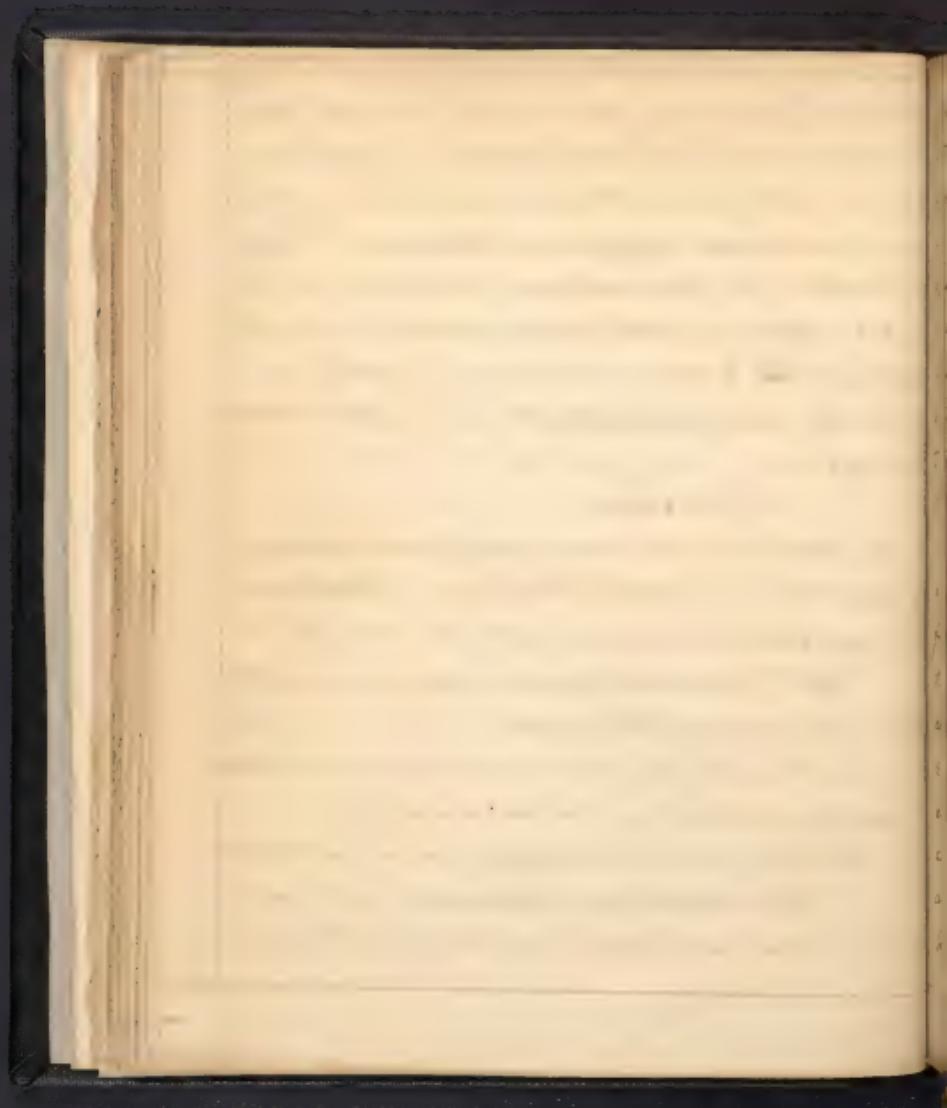
In treating of the cure of dyspepsia we will  
follow the example of Dr. Cullen, and others, or  
laying down three several indications.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of these is to remove as far as we are able,  
the remote causes of the disease,

The 2<sup>nd</sup> is to obviate or remove those symptoms  
which tend to continue or increase it, and

The 3<sup>rd</sup> to restore the impaired tone of the stomach.

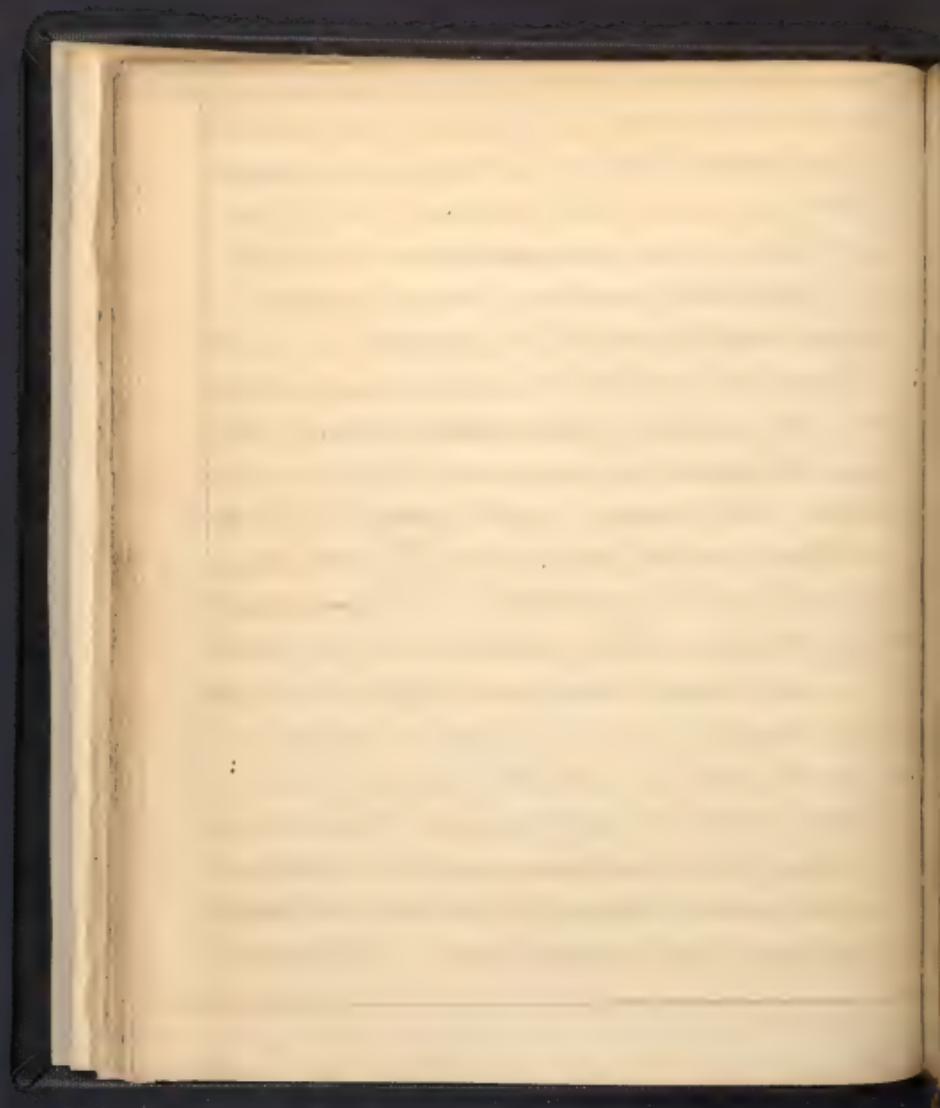
The importance of attending diligently  
to the first must be obvious on the slightest view.



for while the causes of the disease continue to act,  
it is impossible that any impression can be made  
upon it by medicine, or if we could even remove  
it under these circumstances, its recurrence upon  
leaving off the use of medicine would be certain.

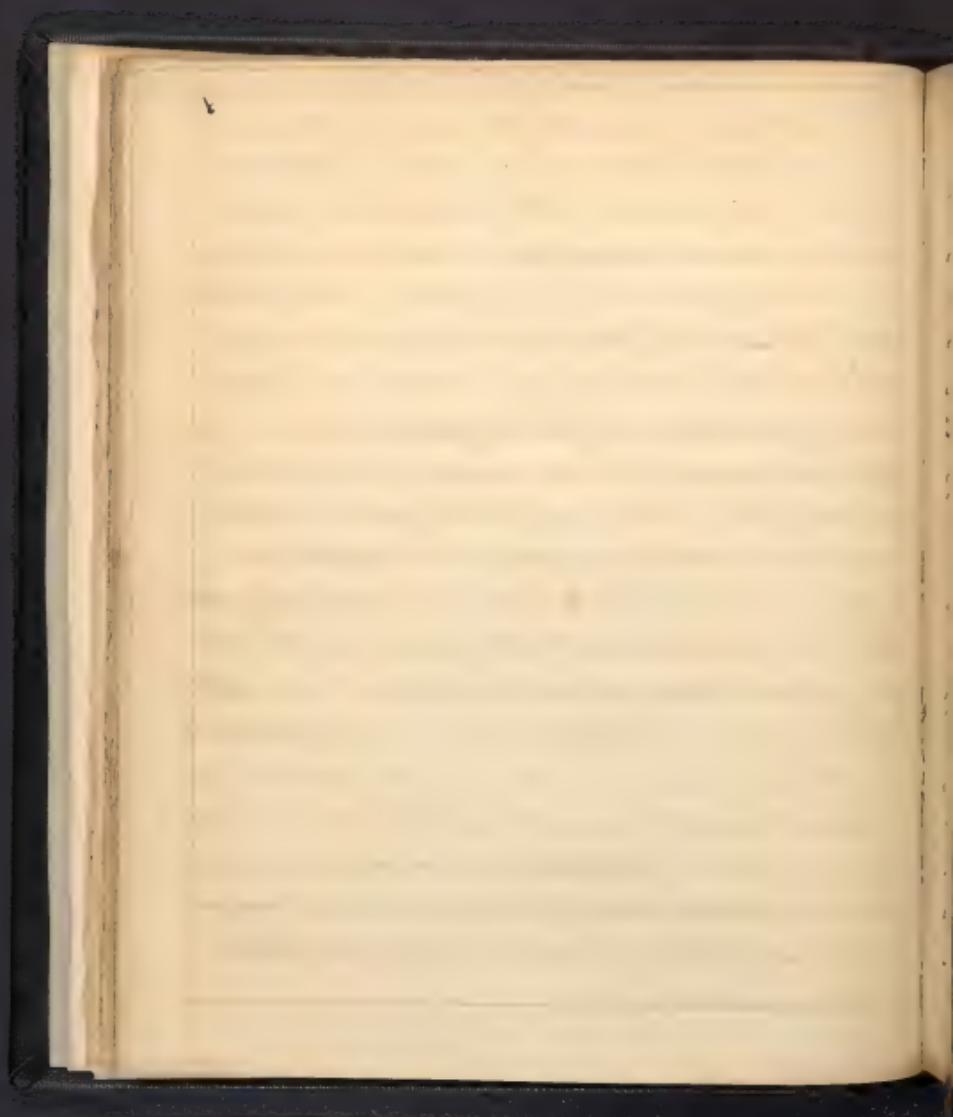
The first step towards the accomplishment of this  
indication, is, to impress the mind of our patient  
with a strong sense of its absolute necessity. Until  
this can be done, our endeavors to work a cure,  
however well directed, will be altogether fruitless.

We are next to point out to him the manner  
in which this is to be effected. "If he leads a  
fashionable life it will be necessary for him to forsake  
the haunts & habits of dissipation: to leave the crowded  
city and its alluring amusements, conducted in  
rooms, where the air he breathes is vitiated and  
contaminated by the great number of persons col-  
lected together, to shun luxurious tables, indolence,  
and late hours, to retrace the footsteps by which he  
had deviated from simple nature; and to count



the country, pure air, moderate, exercise, early rising,  
simple diet, the society of open select friends, and  
pleasing occupations." But to return to his former  
simple & natural mode of life will not now be sufficient.

The stomach debilitated by long disease is no longer cap-  
able of bearing the full & hearty meal in which a man  
in health may with impunity indulge. Even a modest  
meal of miscellaneous food overpowers it and is reje-  
cted. The meals should be small & repeated at short  
intervals. It is of importance that regularity should be  
observed both as to the quantity of food, and the time of  
eating. No food should be of the most simple & digestible  
kind. Vegetables, except of the farinaceous kind, as  
being apt to induce acescence, should as much as pos-  
sible be avoided. But in the choice of food, the patient  
will be guided in some measure by his own experience  
rejecting those articles which he finds to disagree with  
him & vice versa - Much dilution should be avoided  
as a concentrated state of the gastric juice is necessa-  
ry to produce the proper assimilation of the food.



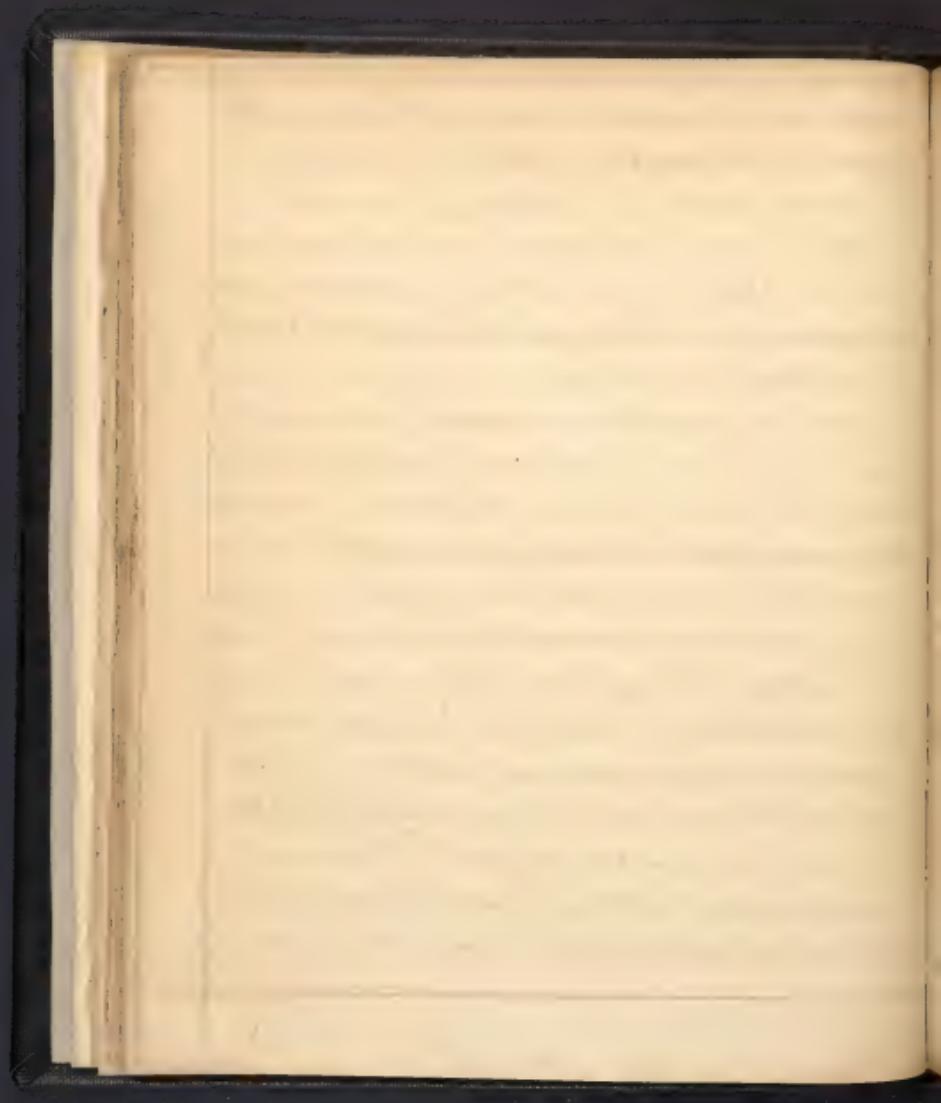
Digestion is to be favored by rest after eating, and by  
foment over the region of the stomach before it, until some  
degree of redness & warmth is excited. For this purpose  
if the hand alone is insufficient, stimulating oils &c  
may be very profitably applied. Dr Kinglake, in a  
communication on dyspepsia to the Editors of the  
"Medical & Physical Journal" insists much on the  
"advantages resulting from a certain domestic plan  
of management" and on the inefficiency of the usual  
plan by tonics & stomachics without diet & operation.

He states that he is warranted in expecting that its  
solitary adoption would in general render the con-  
joint employ of medicine unnecessary in the cure  
of dyspeptic disorders. The treatment alluded to  
consists in cautiously avoiding mechanical exer-  
cise to the organs of digestion & counteracting their  
tremendous languor and indolence which prevents the  
salutary secretion of gastric juice; an agent so  
indispensably necessary to the due decomposition  
and assimilation of alimentary substances.



"Extensive experience" he continues "has now fully confirmed the important fact, that the worst states of dyspepsia arising from defect in stomachic excitability, and gastric secretion, are accompanied with organic lesions may be effectually remedied by an appropriate regard to the quantity of diet taken at a time, to suitable mastication, friction over the region of the stomach and the avoidance of costiveness."

He limits the quantity of aliment to be taken by his patient at one time, to two ounces, contains however chiefly to animal food, particularly mutton & pork, and enjoins that this food should be masticated until by comminution and salivary commixture it be reduced to a state of semifluidity. This meal he allows to be reheated every three hours. He forbids deluent fluids at the time of eating and until one hour after each repast, and limits the quantity of fluid to be taken in three hours to half a pint. About half an hour previous to eating he directs brisk friction to be made with a flesh brush over the region of



16

The stomach during ten minutes, and a similar  
intention to follow it. Of the manner of obviating co-  
stiveness, we will speak hereafter.

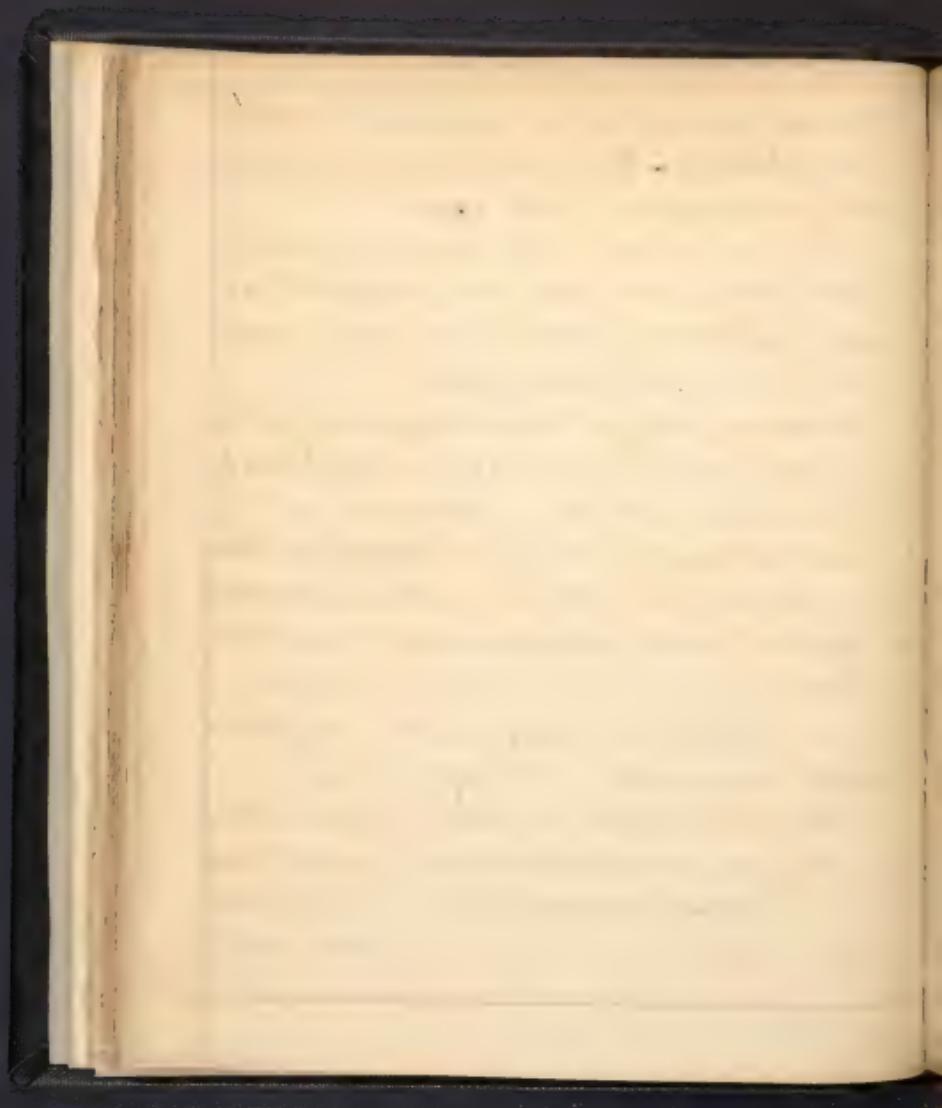
The most common symptoms which it is  
the object of the Dr's intention or indication to re-  
move, are flatulency, morbid acidity, crudities  
in the stomach and costiveness.

Flatulency may be relieved by the use of that  
class of medicines termed carminatives, such  
as Olearum Anisi, Mentha, Tuligii &c.

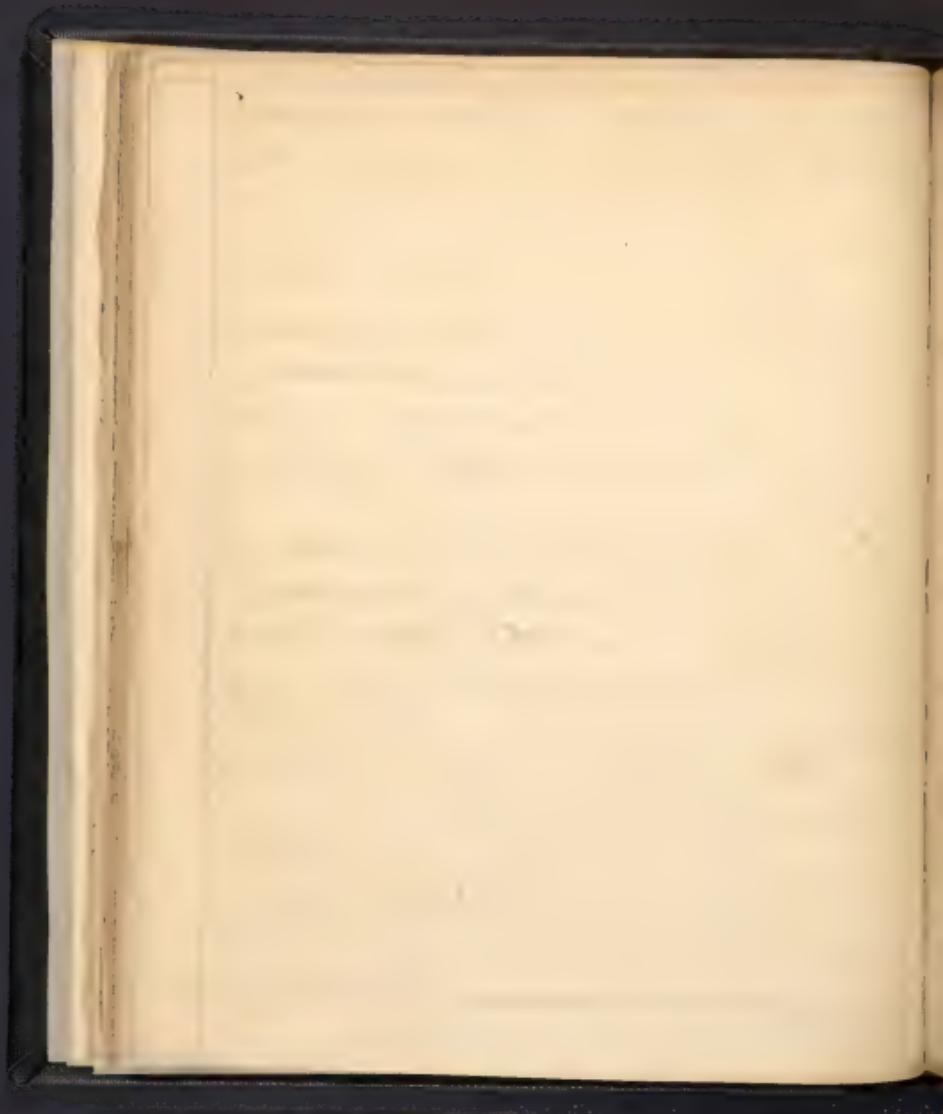
Morbid acidity, the effects of which are heart  
burn, gnawing pain of the stomach, acid excretion.  
It is to be obviated by the cautious use of absorbents,  
of which aqua calcis is perhaps the best, and a  
noxious attention to diet, avoiding everything  
likely to become acid in the stomach.

Crudities in the stomach, the effect of debili-  
ty in that organ, are to be removed by gentle emetics.

To obviate costiveness, is an object which the  
physician should constantly have in view, in the



treatment of dyspepsia. The connection between  
the stomach and intestines is such that a disorder  
or motion existing in the one, is inevitably commu-  
nicated to the other — In order to establish a  
regular discharge of the contents of the intestines  
it is of the first importance, that an inviolable cus-  
tom of periodically soliciting an evacuation by  
voluntary efforts should be instituted. These efforts  
should on no occasion be omitted. They should at  
each trial be continued for ten or fifteen minutes,  
if the peristaltic motion be not sooner excited; and  
the trials should be pursued in for a week, a fort-  
night or if that should not be sufficient, for a  
month. If these attempts should at last prove ine-  
ffective, we must resort to the use of laxative medi-  
cines. The choice of these is of importance & requires  
much of the physician's attention — As any copi-  
ous evacuation or active purging would be followed  
by debility of the intestines, we should have such  
as would merely keep the bowels in their natural



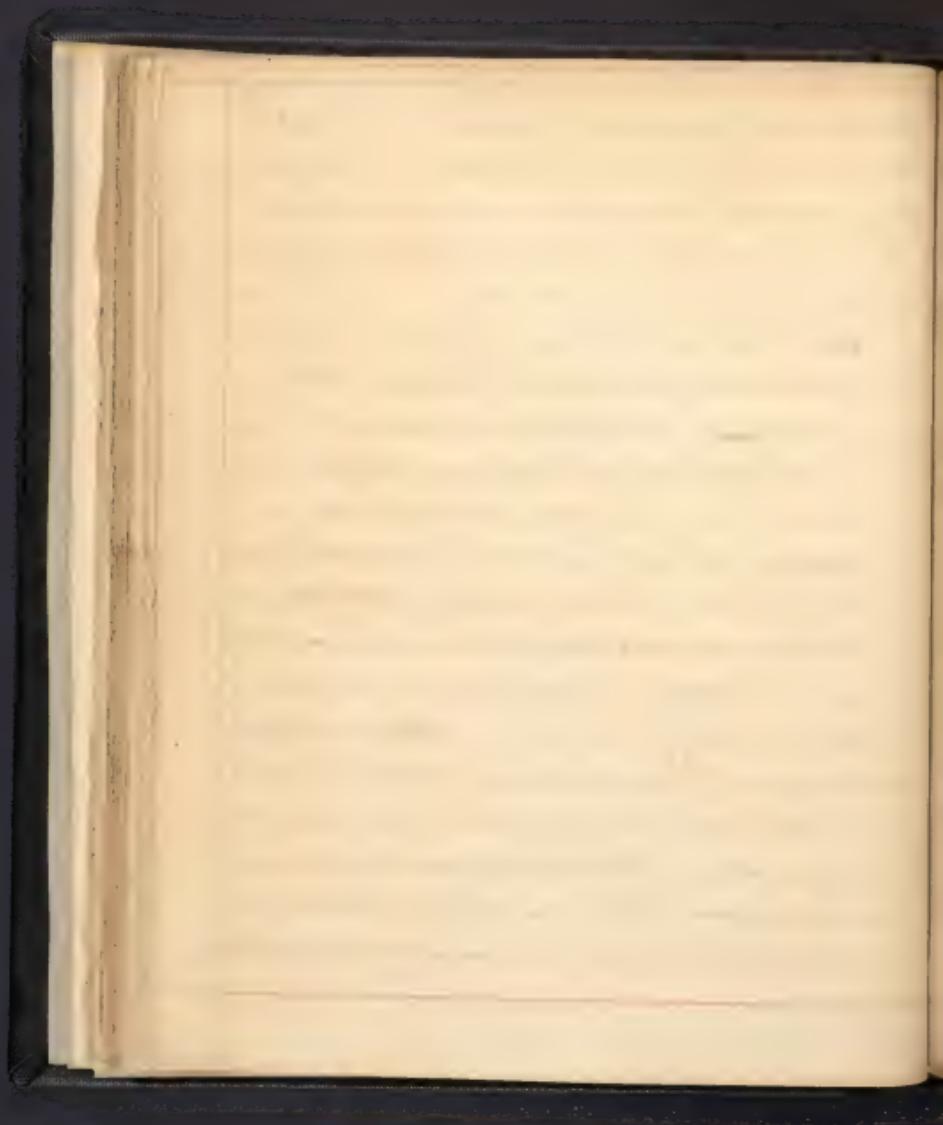
18

tate of laxity — Those medicines which stimulate principally the lower intestines are perhaps best adapted to the fulfilment of this intention.

Equal parts of Lac. Sulph. & Slag. Cal. are highly recommended by prof. Chapman.

Our 3<sup>d</sup> & last, and we may add proper curative indication is to restore the impaired tone of the stomach — The treatment under this indication is of two kinds viz 1. such as directly & immediately increases the tone of the stomach itself, and  
2. such as by operating first upon the system in general and increasing its tone adds strength to this organ.

For the accomplishment of the first, we call to our aid, all that numerous & invaluable class of medicines called Roburantes or tonics. Of these the chalybeates, Peruvian bark, colombo, gentian, quassia, the mineral acids, bals. bovinæ &c are in high estimation. The Lupulus communis or common hop, & some of the mineral tonics besides those mentioned, have of late been much recommended.



The sop as being possessed of a narcotic quality is per-  
haps adapted to those cases in which there is much pain  
or watchfulness. As a narcotic it is sometimes preferable  
to opium, as not having the same tendency to induce  
costiveness. —

The white oxide of Bismuth  
has within a few years, been spoken of in terms of high  
commendation as a medicine in dyspepsia, and espe-  
cially for the relief of spasmodic pains, gastralgia, pyro-  
sis, and other troublesome affections of the stomach.

Dr Moore of N.York published in 1811 "an inaug-  
ural dissertation on the medicinal virtues of the white  
oxide of Bismuth" in which he gives abstracts from cases  
related by Drs. Marcet & Bardley, and some cases  
which came under his own observation in which this  
medicine had been employed with very happy effects.

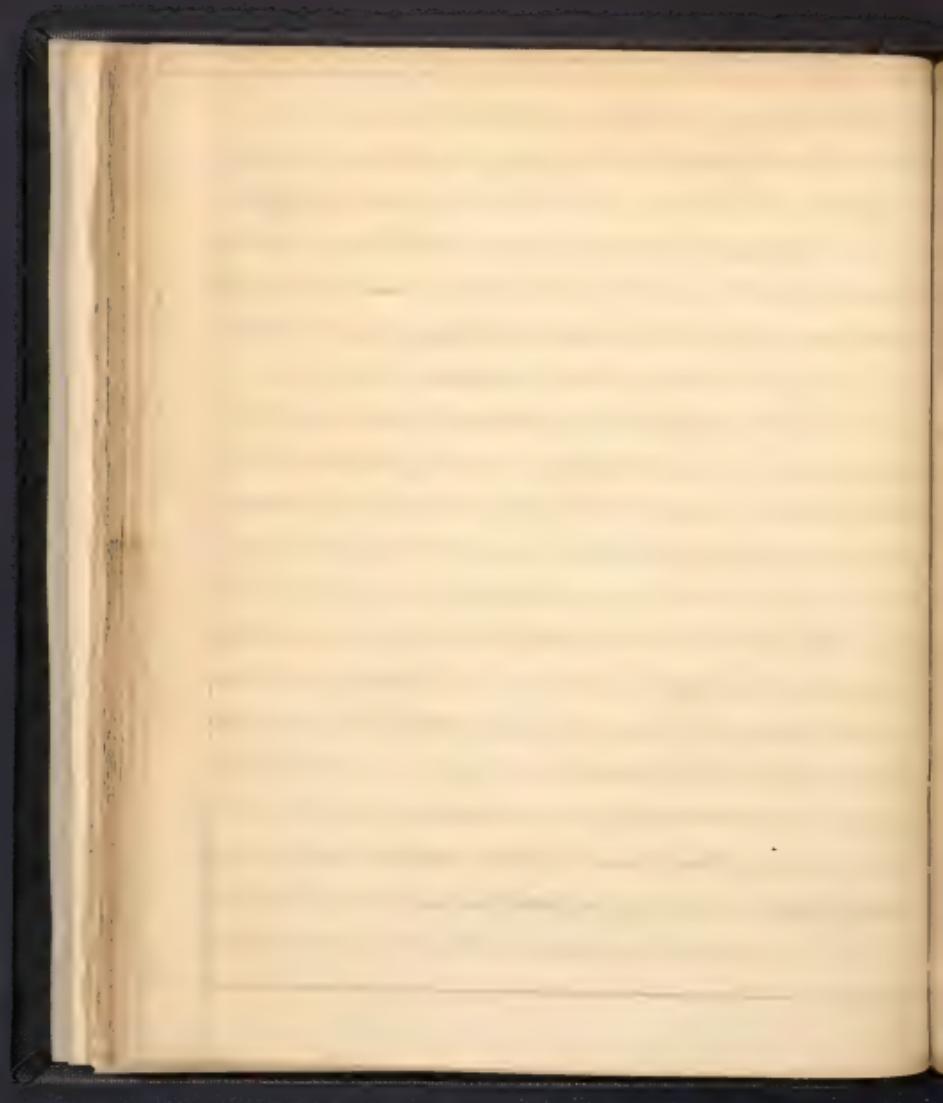
It has also employ'd extensively on the continent of  
Europe, and by some others in our own country with  
similar results. Its dose is from gr. viij ad gr. ix, with  
about xxv gr. of Gum. tragacanth, or Gum Arabic, to be  
repeated three times per diem.



20

The Sulphate of Alumine & Potash or common alum I have known to be employed with very beneficial effects. A person who had been for years afflicted with dyspeptic symptoms and who had gone through the usual routine of stomachic or tonic medicines, together with an alternative course of Mercury with but slight or temporary advantage took three or four times a day half a wine glass full of a salinare of alum. The effect was an immediate improvement in the state of his health which proceeded to the relief of all his unpeasant symptoms. This effect continued under the constant use of the medicine for some months, but then gradually wore off and the patient has now relapsed into his former unwholesome and almost hopeless condition. It had been apprehended from the astringent power of the alesines, that consternys might be induced by it, but the patient and his physician were much gratified to find that the bowels were kept in a favorable state of openness.— Other cases have been related to me by persons worthy of credit in which its good effects have been more permanent.

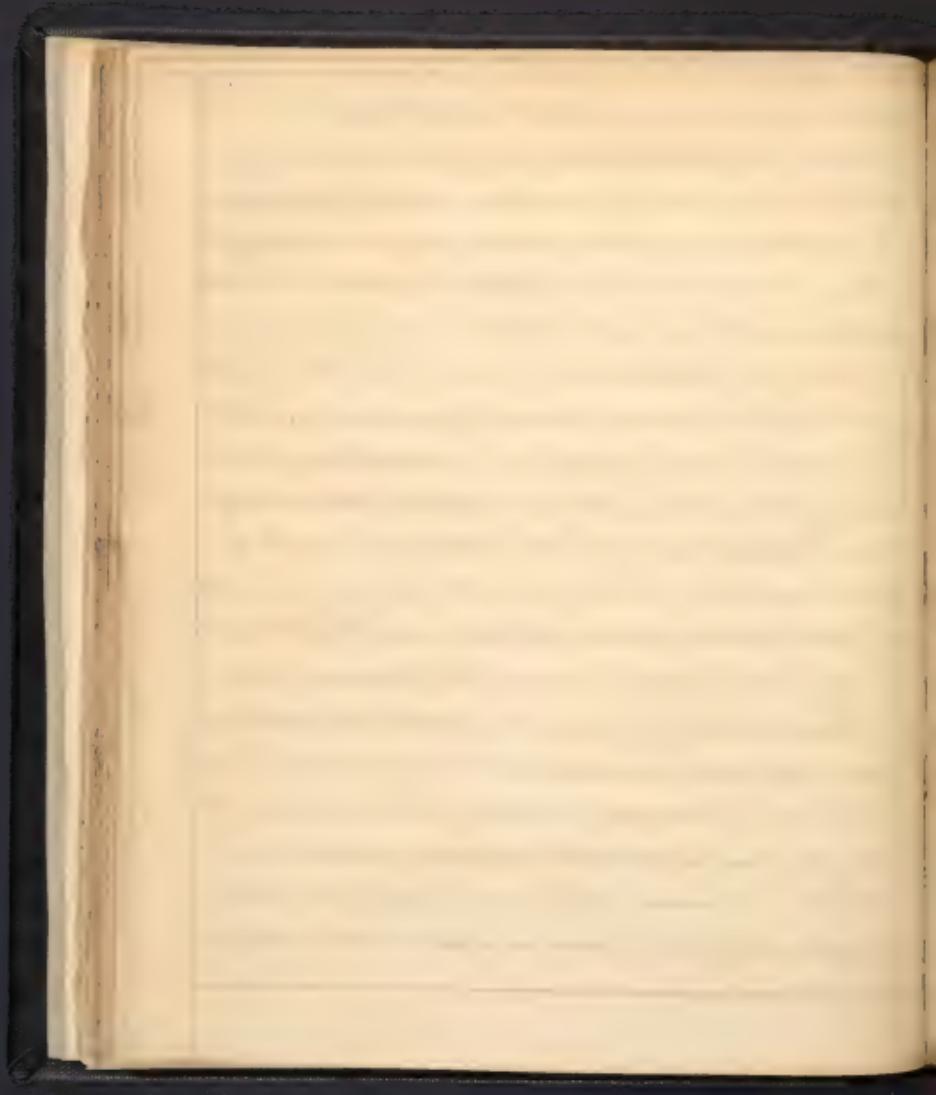
These medicines varied in their dose and manner



of excretion concurring with the treatment advised for the disease. Judgment of the first indication will direct with caution we are fond of offering much relief and in many cases will affect cure. But great caution in their application is indeed necessary for experience has abundantly shown that their long continued use de-  
cilitates instead of giving tone to the stomach. In frequent and unintermission use of aromatic teas to tea, &c. are often lost by the great relief they procure, is extremely pernicious & ought to be avoided. And sparingly at the time of eating they may be serviceable by enabling the stomach to perform its function for the time being. Our 2<sup>d</sup> mode of restoring the tone of the stomach is by the use of those means which operating first on the system in general & restoring its tone thereby add strength to this organ. The principal remedies of this class are exercise, and the application of cold.

Exercise, besides its general tonic effect, is peculiarly useful in these cases, on account of its tendency to excite the action of the vessels on the surface of the body, between which and the stomach there subsists a strong sympathy or concert —

The degree of exercise should never go so far as to induce fatigue as this would produce an effect directly contrary



22

to that we desire.— Different species of exercise should be devised for those affected with different degrees of debility so that it may be continued a considerable length of time without inducing weariness. For the patient who is much reduced the different kinds of gestation are most suitable as sailing riding or a carriage, on horseback &c.

Walking and manual labor are to be practised by him who has as yet lost but little of his natural strength.

Cold applied either dry or by cold affusion, has also a tonic effect on the respiratory vessels, and sympathetically on the stomach, and is therefore in many cases an useful remedy in this disease— If bathing is recommended it is thought best in such cases to begin with the tepid bath, and to reduce the temperature gradually— A flannel shirt is cooler muscles in summer are preferable to linen, on account of their keeping the temperature more uniform.

It is proper that the minds of dyspeptic patients should be always occupied and amused—

The benefit derived by patients of this description, while attending public baths and watering places



23

is to be attributed as much to the exercise and amusement of their minds by change of scene and agreeable company as to any medicinal virtues the waters may possess. —

17  
Leyendo el libro de la Biblia se dice que el Señor  
nos ha querido regalar su voluntad de amor  
y de paz. De modo similar, en la Biblia se dice que el Señor